

Senator
**Betti
Sheldon**

1998 LEGISLATIVE REPORT



April, 1998

Dear Neighbors,

The 1998 session of the Legislature was one of great success for our area, moderate success for the state as a whole, and one of missed opportunities for investments in our state's future.

Democrats and Republicans worked well together to win approval for four new foot ferries to run between Seattle and Kingston and Southworth.

We worked closely to toughen our drunk driving laws, to expand property tax relief for senior and disabled

citizens, and to improve the way we pay for long-term nursing care.

And we joined forces to implement an exciting new program we approved in 1997, the Pre-paid College Tuition plan. It will allow parents to pay for their children's future education at today's tuition prices.

That bipartisan cooperation broke down, however, when it came to the traditionally nonpartisan issues of public education and transportation, which is too bad, because neither party has a lock on good ideas.

But I'd rather emphasize the positive. So please take a look at what we accomplished, and what we still need to work on, and send me your questions and comments. Fresh ideas are always welcome!

Warm regards,

Betti L. Sheldon

Betti Sheldon

State Senator, 23rd Legislative District

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New Passenger-only Ferries!

A bipartisan victory

What a tremendous victory for the West Sound! Sen. Bob Oke and I joined forces to win support in the Senate for the measure authorizing construction of four new foot ferries for the Seattle-Kingston and Seattle-Southworth runs. Ferry bills have died in the Senate repeatedly, but what really made the difference this year was all the hard work and vocal bipartisan support we got from citizens and organizations in Kitsap.

Secretary of Transportation Sid Morrison and State Ferries Director Paul Green will give us a clearer picture of the funding situation for the ferries at **two Town Hall Meetings on Transportation I'm hosting in our district on Saturday, May 9th.**

Transportation Funding

Not a sound plan for the future

Except for our success with passenger-only ferries, it was a disappointing session regarding our state's transportation problems. A number of good bills — bills that would have provided long-term transportation solutions — were stalled or run off the road.

What we needed was a responsible, long-term funding plan. What we got doesn't meet that standard. The transportation plan put forth is a hodge-podge of borrowing and cash transfers, a shell game that takes money from schools and children — and then asks them to pick up the tab over the next 25 years.

(continued on next page)

(Transportation continued)

To pay for just five years of highway funding, we're being asked to authorize \$1.9 billion in debt — the largest debt authorization in the history of our state.

That's like asking for a 25-year loan to pay for a car that lasts for five years. This just doesn't add up in my book.

The people of our state expect and deserve better. If we are to make any real progress in Olympia, on this issue or any other, legislators have to stop thinking about the next election and start thinking about the next generation.

The transportation plan will be on the ballot in November.

New DUI Laws

Making our highways safer

Last year, about 350 people in our state were hurt or killed in alcohol-related accidents. When that many people are hurt by a disease, we call it an epidemic.

This year, the Legislature approved long-overdue changes to our DUI laws:

- Blood-alcohol (BAC) limit reduced from .10 down to .08;
- 90-day license suspension for first offense;
- Electronic home monitoring for repeat offenders;
- Seven-year license suspension on third offense;
- Mandatory ignition-locking devices for those convicted with BAC of .15 or above;
- Conviction remains on police record for seven years; and
- Deferred prosecution allowed only once.

Education — The Year of Missed Opportunities

The state's top priority gets short shrift

Our state constitution makes public education the state's top priority. But that responsibility was mostly ignored by budget writers this year. Several modest investments to improve education were proposed, but



High school students from our district stopped by my office for a visit while in Olympia to lobby on behalf of anti-smoking efforts. The Legislature listened and made it illegal for anyone under 18 to possess tobacco. It was already illegal for them to buy it.

Pre-paid College Tuition

Tomorrow's education at today's prices

One of the best things the Legislature has done to help working families recently is the Pre-paid College Tuition Act. We created the program last year, and this year we gave it the necessary start-up funding. It will be up and running in late summer.

Under the act, you will be able to buy "units" of tuition at current rates that can be applied to a college education in the future, whether it's next year or 20 years from now. And it will pay tuition at any university, college, or technical college in Washington, public or private, and at many other colleges and universities around the country.

Watch for ads for the program starting this summer.

each was turned down by the majority.

One would **reduce class size** so that students could get more individual attention from teachers. Another plan would allow schools to offer **before- and after-school tutoring, "Saturday academies," and summer classes** to give our students every opportunity to get the help they need. Even an amendment to the budget we offered that would help pay for more school nurses was rejected.

This is troubling to me because, as with transportation, public education has always enjoyed bipartisan support. It should **not** be a partisan issue, because neither political party has a lock on good ideas.

This political game-playing is hurting our children — and our state's future.

Energy Deregulation Halted — For Now...

"The Electricity Consumers Protection Act"

Because of our legacy of public power, Washingtonians pay the lowest electricity rates in America. That's threatened by the possibility of electricity deregulation.

The good news is that we succeeded in stopping deregulation in our state this year. The bad news is that the idea is still being pushed on the national level by our own U.S. senator, Slade Gorton — which



Gov. Locke congratulated Mr. Hank Mann Sykes of Silverdale upon signing into law my bill creating the new Washington State Gift of Life Medal.

State Gift of Life Medal

A plea for more organ donors

I always say that the best ideas at the Legislature come from the people back home. The new Washington State Gift of Life

Medal is one of

those ideas. It was suggested to me by Mr. Hank Mann Sykes of Silverdale, a transplant recipient. Our bill makes the Medal available to the families of organ donors, on behalf of the citizens of Washington, in recognition of the generous gifts made by their loved ones.

Our hope is that this public thank-you can also serve as a public education tool, to let people know how much good a single donor can do for so many other people. If you would like more information about organ donation, I would suggest a call to Life Center Northwest, at (206) 230-5767.

perplexes me to no end given how much Washington **homeowners and small business owners stand to lose in a deregulated power market.**

As a precaution, however, in case deregulation does happen, we wrote and approved the **Electricity Consumers Protection Act**, to protect the rights of residential and small business ratepayers. Our goal is to protect consumers, and our economy, from skyrocketing costs and poor service quality.

How to Get Involved with Your State Government

Some ways are more effective

The response to the mail-back "action gram" I sent out at the beginning of the year was tremendous. And to all of you who thanked me for asking your opinions, you're welcome — and thank you for sending them! I received a wide range of comments and suggestions, on topics ranging from reintroducing wolves to the national parks, to regulation of car phone use.

Here are some of the best ways to really get involved in your Washington state government:

1. Get to know your legislators. I encourage you to call me at my district office, or call my Legislative Assistant, Betty Kendall, in Olympia. Or you can e-mail me at any time: sheldon_be@leg.wa.gov.

2. Write letters. I answer all letters I receive from people who are concerned about a problem and want to get involved. You may want to include a copy of any correspondence you're sending to the governor, state officials, or other legislators so that I can more effectively follow up on your ideas and concerns.

3. Call the toll-free Legislative Hotline. Throughout the year, you can call the toll-free hotline at 1-800-562-6000 to leave a message for me, another legislator, or the Governor. The hotline for the hearing impaired is 1-800-635-9993.

4. Invite legislators to meetings. I always welcome the opportunity to meet with individuals, groups, and local organizations to discuss concerns, or just for the chance to get to know each other better. Please call Betty Kendall at the Olympia office if you'd like to arrange a meeting.

5. Contact a local party organization. Whether it's one of the two major political parties, or smaller third parties, there is strength in numbers. Organized groups with common concerns can speak that much louder.

Salmon Restoration

Too little progress to please feds

Finding agreement on ways to help restore Washington's wild salmon runs is difficult because it requires sacrifice from everyone. We did, however, manage to approve some funding for salmon habitat restoration, which includes giving technical assistance to citizens and groups who are taking the initiative and restoring streams on their own. We also funded the mass-marking of hatchery chinook in order to maintain some fishing opportunities without further jeopardizing wild salmon.

But all in all, the Legislature's efforts fell short of the kind of comprehensive solution we need to stave off federal intervention under the Endangered Species Act come next year.

Thank You, Pages

Local students help the Legislature run smoothly

My thanks to each of the young people from our district who served our state this year as Senate pages. When things run smoothly at the Legislature, pages usually deserve a great deal of the credit. This year's Senate pages from the 23rd Legislative District are pictured above.



Shelby Darrow
Kingston Junior High School

Neal Bushaw
Central Kitsap Junior High School

Diana Myrvang
Home School

Jiah Barnett
Fairview Junior High School

Property Tax Relief

Exemptions and deferrals for more citizens

In 1995, a bill I sponsored expanded property tax relief for seniors and disabled citizens. This year, I was pleased to lend my support to another measure that builds upon my bill. It further expands the program in several ways:

- A deduction is authorized from disposable household income for health care insurance for either spouse and for veterans' benefits for disabilities related to military duty.

- The parcel size limit for the exemption program is increased from one acre up to five acres if zoning requires the larger size.
- In addition, the income levels for eligibility for the exemption program and the exemption amounts are increased as follows:
 - A. If the income is \$24,001 to \$30,000, all excess levies are exempted.
 - B. If the income level is \$18,001 to \$24,000, all excess levies are exempted and regular levies on the greater of \$40,000 or 35 percent of assessed value (\$60,000 maximum) are exempted.

C. If the income level is \$18,000 or less, all excess levies are exempted and regular levies on the greater of \$50,000 or 60 percent of assessed value are exempted.

The new law applies to taxes payable in 1999 and thereafter.

My proposal to **reduce property taxes on all homeowners** by getting the state out of the property tax business altogether was turned down again this year. But it's a good idea, and I'm going to introduce it again next year, and I'll be working over the coming months to gain more support for it.

Transportation Town Hall Meetings Saturday, May 9th



Secretary of Transportation
Sid Morrison

With so many transportation problems facing the people of Kitsap, we need the people in charge to come spend some time discussing the issues and answering citizens' questions.

Secretary of Transportation Sid Morrison, Ferries Director Paul Green, and Regional Administrator Gary Demich will join me for two Town Hall Meetings on Saturday, May 9th.

I hope you can attend one of them.

Poulsbo ■ 10:00 a.m. to noon
Sons of Norway Hall ■ 18891 Front Street NE

Silverdale ■ 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Community Center A-Frame ■ 9729 Silverdale Way NW

If you'd like more information in advance of these events, please call my Legislative Assistant, Betty Kendall, in Olympia at (360) 786-7644.

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